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To: The Energy & Technology Committee
Of the Connecticut Legislature

In the 2007 CEAB report from pgs 37-39 it was clearly indicated that almost 100,000 people in Connecticut were living "unaffordable" due to energy costs. Despite this the DPUC allowed incredible rate hikes severely effecting thousands, 50% for UI and over 30% for CL&P. Since that time ratepayers have been battered by high gas & oil prices, a foreclosure deluge, recession economy and increasing taxes and cost of living. Because of the tortured way in which we buy electric power in Connecticut with no transparency through third party speculators on the stock market this situation can only grow worse.

Despite this the Legislature avoided substantive reform in the last legislative session to provide ratepayers relief and a rational long-term plan for energy in our state. The rationale was to support very modest conservation and efficiency measures. Sadly most of those measures have almost no effect on average ratepayers. The two measures that might have provided some relief were not even bonded but were line item vetoed by the Governor which the legislature did not bother to revisit.

I found out about one of these by chance when my Mother in laws furnace had to be replaced. Having bought a high efficiency replacement for it we went to the state seeking the \$500 rebate that was part of the law passed only to find it had not been funded. The same is true for several million dollars earmarked for Operation Fuel. Once again our most vulnerable citizens left in the lurch. Most other large scale conservation suggestions are not even practicable for the large percentage of renters in Connecticut who have no way to put them to effect.

Another questionable piece is the so-called promise to reduce green house gases in so many years. Polluters are given an out in the form of buying certificates from other companies who are supposedly actually reducing their carbon production. This is a shell game that will not necessarily reduce local pollution at all. We need real reductions that can be calculated for their impact right here in Connecticut. My West River neighborhood is one of the worst polluted sites in Connecticut and many such heavily minority neighborhoods gain nothing from such shell games. The states from which we would derive such reductions are all to our East on the other side of the prevailing winds. Reducing carbon is vital but we need to actually do it locally.

In addition clean energy investment remained a miniscule token in the last session ignoring our pressing need to develop vibrant responses to the dwindling and extravagant oil and gas reserves and wean our state from the worst polluting technologies. Given the dire direction of our planetary environment our goal for clean energy should be a minimum of 20 % by 2010 not 2020.

We believe raised bill 5819 makes a modest beginning at addressing some of these issues and together with 5783 can begin to protect our most vulnerable citizens while also giving leverage to the State in the buying, generating and distribution process. It also further opens the door wider for local clean, renewable energy projects that can help to reduce peak demands and give relief to local communities and small businesses that wish to form energy cooperatives.

We urge you to examine these bills and pass these modest reforms to put Connecticut on the map not for the highest electric rates on the continent but for the most forward thinking energy policy.

Thank you,


Frank Panzarella, member of Fight the Hike

Conference on religion, ecology starts Feb. 28

NEW HAVEN — A conference that will explore the emerging alliance of religion and ecology will be held Feb. 28 to March 2 at Yale University.

The conference is "Renewing Hope: Pathways of Religious Environmentalism."

Religious leaders will examine their traditions' environmental ethics and practice.

Pressing issues related to water, climate change, energy and eco-design will also be discussed with expert facilitators.

For more information about the conference and registration, contact Gustav Spohn, director of communications and publications at Yale Divinity School, 432-3466, gus.spohn@yale.edu.

Stratford business closing

Ross & Roberts decision made due to high costs; 60 losing jobs

By **ROB VARNON**
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The state's high electricity prices, combined with global competition and rising raw materials costs, are forcing Stratford-based Ross & Roberts Inc. to close its doors and throw 60 people out of work, a company owner said Thursday.

"It was a difficult decision for everyone," owner and vice president Samuel Rosenberg said.

The plant will be shut down gradually to fill back orders, Rosenberg said. The equipment will be sold off and, eventually, the land.

There is no plan to continue operating Ross & Roberts in another state, he added.

Ross & Roberts, which makes vinyl coverings for walls, upholstery and boats, was founded about 60 years ago in New Haven, according to Rosenberg, but moved to 1299 W. Broad St. in Stratford shortly after that. Rosenberg's father bought the company in the 1980s.

The company paid \$81,966.16 in real estate and \$5,426.12 in personal property taxes in the most recent year. The company is up to date on its taxes, according to town Tax Collector Deb Heim.

Rosenberg said the property taxes weren't an issue for the company, it was a matter of materials and electricity.

The company's raw material prices are based on natural gas and oil prices, which have jumped in

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recent years. Due to global competition from areas with lower costs, Ross & Roberts wasn't able to increase the prices it charges customers and, as a result, saw its profit margin shrink, Rosenberg said.

"A difficult Connecticut business environment" added to the company's woes, he said.

Specifically, Rosenberg said his company was an intensive user of electricity, and Connecticut prices are the highest in the continental U.S.

The Rosenbergs informed workers and the

town of their decision Wednesday, according to Bruce Alessie, Stratford's economic development special projects coordinator.

Alessie said there were mixed emotions in the town, because Ross & Roberts' closing announcement came at the same time Big Y opened a new store.

The grocery store held its grand opening Thursday in a new \$20 million shopping center on Hawley Lane. It has hired 200 employees, according to the company.

Alessie said the town tries to support all its businesses, but there was nothing the municipality could do to help the company. That's because electricity prices are beyond jumped.

Stratford's control and only the state can tackle that problem.

Paul Timpanelli, president and chief executive officer of the Bridgeport Regional Business Council, agreed.

"No doubt," he said of the high cost of electricity in Connecticut. "It's a problem that's not going away."

Timpanelli said the state should focus on expanding the grid and the supply of electricity in order to lower prices.

The loss of Ross & Roberts did not surprise Timpanelli. He said the company is in a tough business at a time when costs have jumped.